

Interview of Hong Chanthy

A: Interviewer: Khlot Vicchay

B: Interviewee: Hong Chanthy

Summary of the Interview

Hong Chanthy was born in 1986 near the railroad in Tuol Kork district, Phnom Penh. In this interview, she shares enjoyable stories, ranging from her family history to some of her greatest trials, such as witnessing her brother being wrongfully imprisoned by the police. Despite her struggles, she discusses her religious devotion as a “pillar” of strength during her toughest times.

A: So my name is Vicchay, Khlot Vicchay, and I am interviewing a young woman whose name is Hong—

B: Hong Chanthy.

A: Hong Chanthy, at the North District church building, on the—what’s the date? The fifth! A Sunday in February 2016. So, there is a university in America that is doing a project to interview members of a family to help people know more about their family. Therefore, I’d like to—may I ask you a few questions about your life?

B: Yes.

A: Yes, so going on, we want to—because—we want to take note of what you say and help you to remember all the details. And the university will give you a copy, which means that whenever you want to watch or listen to it, you can go on to the Church’s—BYU’s website. Do you have a cell phone number?

B: I don’t have a personal phone number.

A: Doesn’t have, okay. Do you have an email address?

B: No.

A: Also doesn’t have. What is your full name?

B: Hong Chanthy.

A: Hong Chanthy. And that’s the same name as on your ID card, right?

B: Yes.

A: Do you have a preferred name?

B: My preferred name is just the same, Chanthy.

A: So since your childhood, has anyone called you something different?

B: They called me Chak Chen.

A: Chak Chen. Have you ever learned any languages besides Khmer?

B: No.

A: No. You know how to write Khmer well, right?

B: You could say it's good, but it isn't 100% perfect.

A: Where were you born?

B: I was born in Phnom Penh.

A: Phnom Penh, what village and district?

B: Village Number 22, on the railroad, Tuol Kork district.

A: Tuol Kork district. And how old are you?

B: 30 years old.

A: 30 years old. What year were you born in?

B: 1986.

A: '86. And what year was that in the zodiac?

B: The year of the rabbit.

A: The year of the rabbit. And you're not married yet?

B: Not yet.

A: So, the next question I want to ask you is—how many siblings do you have?

B: There are five of us.

A: Five. How many boys and how many girls?

B: Two girls and three boys.

A: Two girls, three boys—and how is your family now?

B: Right now?

A: Having difficulties or—

B: There are some difficulties.

A: How is it difficult?

B: It's difficult in that my family doesn't know how to live in harmony. And it's hard as far as providing a livelihood. That's all.

A: And what do you know about your parents? Do you know when they were born?

B: Honestly, I never took notice of my parents' birthdays.

A: Okay, so what are their names?

B: My father's name is Hong Sokhoeun.

A: Hong Sokhoeun. And your mother?

B: My mother is Am Chan Srey Phal.

A: Do you know their ages? Your father's?

B: My father is in his fifties.

A: Fifties, and your mom?

B: Mom's in her forties.

A: Do you know what year they were born?

B: I don't remember—oh! Like the zodiac? My mom was in Vok, the year of the monkey.

A: Year of the monkey, and your father?

B: My father was in Chlov, the year of the ox.

A: The ox—and what do you remember about your grandparents? Did your parents ever tell you about them?

B: Yes, I can remember some. My grandfather on my father's side, my father said that he was a pilot back in the day. He was a pilot, and he was an extraordinary man. In that district—Koh Thom district, Kandal province, Koh Thom—he built a great achievement. He made a canal for the people who lived there to have it easier. They call it Prek Ta Hoh [the Flying Grandpa Canal].

A: Prek Ta Hoh.

B: Yes, Prek Ta Hoh was the work of my grandpa.

A: Mmhmm.

B: What I know about my grandpa is that he was a good man.

A: Yes.

B: And he did many things to help the people of his day to be better off. I love my grandpa.

A: And on your mom's side?

B: Yeah, for my grandpa on my mom's side, my mom told me that in his day he was a military policeman.

A: An MP.

B: Yeah, and his achievement was he caught a lot of criminals.

A: Uh-huh.

B: Yeah, and he was the fiercest and determined man. But he was on the side of justice, always doing what was right, never took any bribes in his time. And I remember one thing my mom said about my grandpa, that he was a determined man who loved justice. That's the point I remember about my grandpa, and I praise his achievements, too.

A: Yes, and what about your grandmas?

B: My grandma on my father's side was a normal woman, but a long time ago she worked in the palace.

A: In the palace—

B: She was—they call them nursemaids.

A: Yes, a nursemaid.

B: Yeah, a nursemaid in the palace. She lived with the most orderly house. I know she was a good homemaker, and she raised my father well.

A: Yes.

B: But there wasn't a lot spoken about her. Just that.

A: Anything more?

B: Yeah, as for my grandma on my mom's side, she was a poor woman. Because my grandpa died quickly in that time period, and when my grandpa died, my grandma had these three little kids, and now she was a widow, and she wasn't even literate. So she used her strength to work and raise my mom and my aunts. She lifted sugar—she'd take the barrels of sugar and load them into trucks. She used her strength. She did many hard things to raise my mom and my aunts until they were old enough. So what I remember from my grandma is the history of perseverance while raising three children as a widow. She didn't remarry, because she was afraid they would abuse my mom and my aunts if she did. I admire her. She was a tender, yet firm, woman.

A: Thank you. Do you know where they were born?

B: My grandma was born in Kampong Speu.

A: Kampong Speu—on your mother's side?

B: Yes, my mother's side.

A: And your grandpa?

B: My grandpa—I don't remember.

A: Okay, and what about your father's side?

B: On my father's side, they were in—Koh Thom.

A: They were—

B: Kandal province.

A: Both your grandma and grandpa, right?

B: Right.

A: Do you know when they were born?

B: I don't remember.

A: Their ages, maybe?

B: I know my grandma on my mom's side died when she was 68.

A: She died at 68—how many years ago did she die?

B: I can't remember.

A: Can't remember—So they've all died right? Just your parents now?

B: Yes, just my parents are living.

A: Alright, and concerning your parents, do you think—where were they born? For both of them.

B: For my mom, I don't know where she was born, but I know when she was little she was at Phsar Daum Skov [market].

A: Phsar Daum Skov—and your father?

B: Father was—I think in Kampong Chhnang.

A: He was born in Kampong Chhnang—

B: He—I don't know if he was born there but he—oh! That's right, he was born in Kampong Chhnang. He told me that.

A: Village—do you know what village?

B: I don't know.

A: Doesn't know. So, they were all born in Cambodia—have they ever gone to another country? To visit or whatever?

B: No.

A: No—so coming back to your life. Can you tell me about your life as you grew up, what was it like?

B: When I grew up?

A: Yes. Like—go ahead and speak, and I'll ask other questions later.

B: I don't know how to answer.

A: When you grew up, how was your life?

B: When I've grown up, I have a lot of responsibility. Actually, I don't want to talk about when I've grown up, but when I was a kid.

A: Yes.

B: Right, when I was a child, I decided that when I grew up, I would repay the goodness of my father and mother, and I would try to work hard to help their lives be easier. Because when I was a child, my father drove a cyclo. So when I saw my father at Orussey Market he was riding his cyclo. He didn't see me, but I saw him. I saw my father's fatigue. He rode a cyclo in the middle of the day, and he lifted heavy things. I was devastated and I decided in my heart that when I grew up, I would do whatever I could to help my father have it easier. But when I grew up, I had little knowledge. I couldn't earn enough income to have him live in comfort like others.

A: Uh-huh.

B: But I've tried to use my strength. Use all this strength to work a job in order to help them. Even though it's tiring, I am happy with my blood and sweat that I can help my parents.

A: Yes, thank you very much. Do you have anything more to add? No. So I want to ask you when—where did you go to school—When you were in school, what grade did you learn through?

B: I learned until I was in seventh grade.

A: What was the name of the school?

B: At first, I learned in Neakvoan school, Neakvoan Primary School. When I went up to secondary school—seventh grade was at secondary school—it was at Indradevi High School. I was only in school for three months in seventh grade at the secondary school. And because our family situation was poor, I had to drop out.

A: Mmhmm. At that time, how much money did you take to school?

B: Some days I had—My mom always gave me 500 riel. And some days there wasn't any. Some days I didn't get any.

A: Uh-huh, so you—because you're in Phnom Penh, you don't have a farm. And your family at that time your family were laborers, right? Or workers?

B: Can you ask that again? I didn't catch it.

A: I want to say, when you were little, when you were in school, were your family members workers or what? What did they do for work? All of them.

B: Actually, when I was in school, only one of us was working. It was my father, who rode a cyclo. And my mom was a homemaker.

A: Mmhmm. Your life—How is your life today different from before? How are when you were young and today different?

B: How is what different?

A: I mean to say how are your life today and your life when you were young different?

B: They're different in that when I was young, I didn't worry so much about my family's problems.

A: Uh-huh.

B: But as I've grown up, I've worried a lot about my family. Like I said earlier, I have the responsibility to provide for my family, my parents' family.

A: Mmhmm.

B: So like I said before, there are five of us children. But my older brother has his own family and has six kids of his own.

A: Yeah.

B: But he can't provide for six children. So the burden of those six children falls to me and my parents.

A: Mmhmm.

B: And my younger siblings—as you know, this time is a time of excess and confusion. There are a lot of drugs in Cambodia, and my younger siblings have fallen into that. One of my younger brothers went crazy with drugs. He's got mental problems because of the drugs. My younger sister also has fallen because of drugs. My other younger brother, because he was young and rash, he made mistakes to the point he had to run away from home. So I feel that my family is separated every which way. Even though there are five of us, I feel like there's only me at home. I have to worry a lot about them, worry about my parents, and worry about my older brother. I don't want to say anymore.

A: Yes, thank you. So when you were young, what was your favorite food?

B: I liked Chean Chuon [a fried fish dish with ginger].

A: Chean Chuon, okay. And did you have any games you liked to play when you were young?

B: I didn't like to play games.

A: None at all?

B: None at all.

A: Not even any traditional games?

B: Nope.

A: No—When you were young did you learn how to cook food, or anything to do with food?

B: Yes, I learned from my mom. She taught me.

A: You seem to remember about food. So now for songs, was there any song that you loved and learned to sing when you were young?

B: When I was young, right? The song I loved the most was—I don't remember its title, but it was about mothers.

A: The **Virtue of Mom**?

B: That's it!

A: Yeah, The Virtue of Mom. I like that song too.

B: It was the one I liked the most when I was young.

A: In your family, is there anyone who knew how to play a musical instrument?

B: No.

A: No. What's your house like? It's made of—

B: Of wood.

A: Made of wood. And were you the one who built it or—

B: Actually, for this house I didn't build it. But it was the strength from my work.

A: Mmhmm, so your strength worked to get the money, but when it was being built, did you help them do it, build your house?

B: I didn't help make it, but I helped pick up lumber.

A: You helped pick up the lumber—I think that's helping. That can count as you helping build your house. Now, how's your house, is it still sturdy as ever?

B: It's sturdy.

A: Yes.

B: Even though it's small, it's sturdy.

A: So for this house, it wasn't your father who built it, right? Or—

B: Huh? It was—it wasn't my father because he doesn't have the strength to do it himself. He hired some construction workers to do it.

A: In your family, is there anyone who has any skills or can make something?

B: Yes, my older brother is a woodworker.

A: Woodworker. Is there anyone who is good at weaving or making palm sugar or anything else?

B: No, there isn't, but my mom is skilled at trimming clothes.

A: Trimming clothes.

B: Embroidery, trimmings, that sort of thing.

A: Mmhmm.

B: She's skilled.

A: It's different than weaving, right?

B: Yeah, it's different.

A: So now we'll go to another question, related to facing challenges. Can you tell me about the time that was one of the most difficult in your life?

B: The most difficult time in my life?

A: Yes, and could you tell me about how you got through it?

B: Actually, I have a lot of difficulties, but the most difficult time I can remember—is the most difficult time when I saw my younger brother arrested by the police. Can I count that as a difficult time?

A: Yes, you can, if you think it was the most difficult time for you, whether emotionally or because of the situation.

B: That's right.

A: Yes.

B: It was a time when not only me, but my parents were also having a difficult time. It was in the middle of the night. I, uh—woke up my brother because I made my living at night, I woke up and did it in the night. I woke up my brother, the third just younger than me, to wake up and go boil water for me to wash clams up above. I didn't know that just then a group of police had come to suppress the drug trade.

A: Mhm.

B: Back then, my brother wasn't involved in drugs. So my brother saw them running, and he was scared and ran too. He came back down to the steps of our house, and he thought he was safe. Just then, I was coming downstairs because I heard the raucous noise. When I got down, I saw the police—all armed with guns—binding my brother, putting handcuffs on him to arrest him. I can remember that feeling. It was the hardest thing, because I didn't know what my brother had done wrong. So they took him, and my brother was screaming for me and my parents to help, but I wasn't able to help him. I remember when the police car left, they took my brother and put him into the police car.

A: Uh-huh.

B: I ran after the police car. I ran very hard, I went and whistled and called for them to release my brother, but the police didn't release my brother. That whole night I didn't sleep. I stared at the place they captured my brother. I knelt down and pled to the police to release my brother. I remember that feeling that was the most difficult time. I was scared my brother would be put in jail. You know, if it was someone else, it may have just been a normal situation. But do you know what? I don't know why I was born in this life with such a strong love for my siblings. I love them so much. Sometimes, I just want all the hard things to fall on me—better than opening my eyes and seeing them have such difficulty. And there's lots of other stories, but I'll just use this one.

A: Yes, thank you. How did you get through that time?

B: For me, at that time what I was thinking of was we didn't have any pillar to rely on that had the power to help me. But as I say that, I didn't believe. At that time, what I thought about was God. I put all of those things onto God. And I hope that when we are righteous, all the bad things won't be with us very long. I hope that God can and will help me. Truthfully, at that time if I didn't know there was a God, how could we keep living? That whole night I—I thought of God forever.

A: Uh-huh so that's how you got through it. So now, about a good experience instead. What good experiences have you had, that was the best thing in your life?

B: Good experiences?

A: What you like the most in your life that's the best, that makes you happy. Something you remember and can't ever forget.

B: There almost aren't any—let me think about it—

A: Like something that made you excited, like for example—your nephews were born, or—

B: Ah! Yes! Really, the thing I am the most excited about, I am a person who loves young children. So, my older brother, he didn't have any sons.

A: Mmhmm.

B: He didn't have any sons. And his desire was to have a son. And I wanted a nephew, too. So when they were born, they were nephews, they were boys, and there were 2! That was the thing that made me the most excited.

A: Very good. So for you, you haven't yet married. I want to ask another question: what do you hope to do when you grow up?

B: What I want to do when I grow up?

A: Yes, what you wanted to do when you grew up back when you were young.

B: You know, my desire since I was young was only to be a merchant. So my wish was small, just to be someone who was able to make good money.

A: Uh-huh.

B: And I wanted to make money by opening a big location, that was my desire when I was young.

A: Mmhmm—anything else?

B: There's one other thing, but I'm kind of embarrassed to say it. I wanted to be a singer. That was my wish when I was young.

A: Yes, I think your voice is beautiful.

B: But impossible looking like this. [Laughs]

A: You could just make voice recordings. So that's all the questions we have today. That's all we have about your life. But last of all I want to say to you, thank you for speaking with me and making the recording. And what do you think if we post this recording on the website that's filled with recordings of Cambodians in Cambodia about their personal lives? Do you agree and allow us to post it?

B: Yeah, I give my permission.

A: Yes, she gave permission. So what we post will be on the website of Brigham Young University. You've heard about him, he's a prophet, the second prophet. So that university will make a project and will collect these recordings to post on the website. And the university will provide you with a copy of the interview if you'd like. You can also listen to it anytime you'd like on the website. Or we can anytime we're free, we can check that site, and it's easy. So that's all for my interview today, and finally, I'd like to thank you again for spending your time for this interview today. Thank you. Goodbye.

Interview translated with the help of COHP volunteers before April 2018.